



THE
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By Mr. TOWN,

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— — *Nihil est furacius illo :*

Non fuit Autolyçi tam piceata manus. MART.



Information was the other day laid before a magistrate by a Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians against one of his brethren for a robbery. The prosecutor deposed upon oath, that the other called upon him to see his collection of medals, and took an opportunity of stealing a leather purse formerly belonging to the celebrated *Tom Hearne*, in which were contained, (besides an antique piece of copper-money, place, date, name, figure, and value unknown) a pair of breeches of *Oliver Cromwell*, a *Denarius* of *Trajan* worth fifty shillings, and a *Queen Anne's* farthing value five pounds. He was with much ado dissuaded from carrying on his suit, as the magistrate

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convinced him, that however highly he might rate his own treasures, a jury, who were no *Virtuosi*, would consider a farthing merely as a farthing, and look upon a copper coin of a *Roman Emperor* as no better than a King *George's* half-penny.

I CANNOT indeed, without great concern, as a CONNOISSEUR, reflect on the known dishonesty of my learned brethren. Their scandalous practices, wherever their darling passion is interested, are too notorious to be denied. The moment they conceive a love for rarities and antiques, their strict notions of honour disappear; and Taste, the more it establishes their veneration for *Virtù*, the more certainly destroys their integrity; as rust enhances the value of an old coin by eating up the figure and inscription.

MOST people are masters of a kind of Logic, by which they argue their consciences to sleep, and acquit themselves of doing what is wrong. The country 'squire, of confirmed honesty in all other respects, thinks it very fair to overreach you in the sale of a horse; the man of pleasure, who would scorn to pick your pocket, or stop you on the road, regards it rather as gallantry than baseness to intrigue with your wife or daughter; while the pick-pocket and highwayman value themselves on their honour in being true to the gang. In the same manner the *Virtuoso* does not look on his thefts as real acts of felony, but while he owns that he would take any pains to steal an old rusty piece of brass, boasts that you may safely trust him with untold gold: though he would break open your cabinet for a shell or a butterfly, he would not attempt to force your escritoire or your strong box; nor would he offer the least violence to your wife or daughter, though perhaps he would run away with the little finger of the *Venus de Medicis*.

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Upon these principles he proceeds, and lays hold of all opportunities to increase his collection of rarities: and as *Mabomet* established his religion by the sword, the *Connoisseur* enlarges his Musæum, and adds to his store of knowledge, by fraud and petty larceny.

If the libraries and cabinets of the curious were, like the peacock in the fable, to be stripped of their borrowed ornaments, we should in many see nothing but bare shelves and empty drawers. I know a medalist who at first set up with little more than a paltry series of English coins since the Reformation, which he had the good luck to pick up at their intrinsic value. By a pliant use of his fingers he soon became possessor of most of the *Traders*, and by the same slight of hand he in a short time after made himself master of great part of the *Cæsars*. He was once taken up for coining; a forge, a crucible, and several dies being found in his cellar: but he was acquitted, as there was no law which made it high-treason to counterfeit the image of a *Tiberius* or a *Nero*; and the coin which he imitated was current only among *Virtuosos*.

I REMEMBER another, who picqued himself on his collection of scarce editions and original manuscripts, most of which he had purloined from the libraries of others. He was continually borrowing books of his acquaintance, with a resolution never to return them. He would send in a great hurry for a particular edition, which he wanted to consult only for a moment; but when it was asked for again, he was not at home, or he had lent it to another, or he had lost it, or he could not find it; and sometimes he would not scruple to swear, that he had himself delivered it into the owner's hands. He would frequently spoil a set by stealing a volume, and then purchase the rest for

a trifle. After his death his library was sold by auction; and many of his friends bought up their own books at an exorbitant price.

A THOROUGHbred *Virtuoso* will surmount all scruples of conscience, or encounter any danger to serve his purpose. Most of them are chiefly attached to some particular branch of knowledge, but I remember one who was passionately fond of every part of *Virtù*. At one time, when he could find no other way of carrying off a medal, he run the risk of being choaked by swallowing it, and at another broke his leg in scaling a garden wall for a tulip-root. But nothing gave him so much trouble and difficulty as the taking away pictures and antient marbles; which being heavy and unwieldy, he often endangered his life to gratify his curiosity. He was once locked up all night in the Duke of *Tuscany's* gallery, where he took out an original painting of *Raphael*, and dextrously placed a copy of it in the frame. At *Venice* he turned Roman Catholic, and became a Jesuit, in order to get admittance into a convent, from whence he stole a fine head of *Ignatius Loyola*; and at *Constantinople* he had almost formed a resolution of qualifying himself for the Seraglio, that he might find means to carry off a picture of the Grand Signior's chief mistress.

THE general dishonesty of *Connoisseurs* is indeed so well known, that the strictest precaution is taken to guard against it. Medals are secured under lock and key, pictures screwed to the walls, and books chained to the shelves; yet cabinets, galleries, and libraries are continually plundered. Many of the maimed statues at *Rome* perhaps owe their present ruinous condition to the depredations made on them by *Virtuosos*: the head of *Henry the Fifth*
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in *Westminster Abby* was in all probability stolen by a *Connoisseur*; and I know one who has at different times pilfered a great part of *Queen Catherine's* bones, and hopes in a little while to be master of the whole skeleton. This gentleman has been detected in so many little thefts, that he has for several years past been refused admittance into the *Musæums* of the curious; and he is lately gone abroad with a design upon the ancient *Greek* manuscripts lately discovered at *Herculaneum*.

It may seem surprizing that these gentlemen should have hitherto been suffered to escape unpunished for their repeated thefts, and that a *Virtuoso* who robs you of an *Unic* of inestimable value should even glory in the action, while a poor dog who picks your pocket of fixpence shall be hanged for it. What a shocking disgrace would be brought upon Taste, should we ever see the dying speech, confession, and behaviour of a *Connoisseur* related in the Account of Malefactors by the Ordinary of *Newgate*! Such an accident would doubtless bring the study of *Virtù* into still more contempt among the ignorant, when they found that it only brought a man to the gallows; as the country fellow, when he saw an attorney stand in the pillory for forgery, shook his head, and cried, "Ay, this comes of your writing and reading." It were perhaps worthy the consideration of the legislature to devise some punishment for these offenders, which should bear some analogy with their crimes; and as common malefactors are delivered to the surgeons to be anatomized, I would propose that a *Connoisseur* should be made into a Mummy, and preserved in the Hall of the Royal Society, for the terror and admiration of his brethren.

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I SHALL conclude this paper with the relation of a circumstance which fell within my own knowledge when I was abroad, and in which I declined a glorious opportunity of signalizing myself as a *Connoisseur*. While I was at Rome a young physician of our party, who was eaten up with *Virtù*, made a serious proposal to us of breaking into St. Peter's by night, and taking away the famous painting over the altar-piece. As I had not quite Taste enough to come at once into his scheme, I could not help objecting to him that it was a robbery. *Pob*, says he, *it is a most exquisite picture!*—Ay, but it is not only a robbery, but sacrilege.—*Ob it is a most charming piece!*—Zouns, doctor, but if we should be taken, we shall all be broke upon the wheel.—*Then*, said he, *we shall die MARTYRS.*

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ERRATUM in our last.

Pag. 100, line 23, for *it* read *are*.